

## session 5: **handout** KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE

---

When you become a parent, you will be responsible for your child's safety. Sometimes grown-ups forget that children can't take care of themselves and don't always recognize danger. Simple everyday situations can turn into tragedies if you don't know what to prepare for.

**Bath-time:** Stay with babies, toddlers, and small children when they are in the bathtub, play pool or swimming pool. Don't leave them alone even for a minute, not even just to answer the phone or the doorbell. Any container of water — a mop bucket or even the toilet — can be a danger to a small child. It takes only a couple of minutes for a child to drown.

**In the Car:** Use a car seat until your child is old enough for a regular seatbelt. Never leave a child alone in a car. Be particularly careful in the hot months when the sun is out. Children can die from the heat that builds up in a closed car faster than you might imagine. Keep your car locked if there is any chance that a child might get in without your knowledge. In Texas, it is against the law to leave a child unattended in a car.

**In Your Home:** Lock up guns and poisons. Poisons include medications, cleaning products, paint and paint thinner. You will have to use your imagination: Many common household items that are perfectly safe when used as directed by an adult are deadly dangers to a child who might taste or drink them, or spill them on their skin or in their eyes. Keep emergency numbers near your phone, including 1-(800)-POISON-1.

**When You Are Not There:** Be very careful when you choose the people who will look after your child in your absence. Babysitters should be old enough to know what to do in an emergency and should have experience with children. Make sure the babysitter knows how to provide age-appropriate care. For example, if your child is in diapers, does the babysitter know when and how to change a diaper? Ask for references.

**Learn Effective Parenting Skills:** Physical punishment is not the only or the most effective way to manage a child's behavior, and it is never appropriate with an infant or a very young child. Learn about non-violent and effective ways to teach your child good behavior. Remember to explain when your child has done something wrong. It will also help to praise your child for being good.

### **When Does Discipline Become Abuse?**

Children need to learn rules about what they should do and what they should not do. Then they need to learn that if they break the rules, there will be consequences. An appropriate consequence might be a brief time-out where the child sits quietly under your supervision for 5 to 10 minutes before being allowed to return to toys, play or activities with other children. In the alternative, a privilege, treat or toy might be taken away for a while or even for the rest of the day.

Harsh physical punishment does not improve a child's behavior, and it could be considered child abuse if it results in injury to the child. Inappropriate consequences include:

*Slapping, hitting, kicking, shoving, twisting a child's arm, burning or biting.*

*Yelling, screaming, using sarcasm, threatening, frequently calling a child names or belittling the child.*

*Depriving a child of sleep, food, clothing or shelter. Shutting the child out of the house.*

*Confining the child for prolonged periods of time.*

*Tormenting, terrorizing or deliberately causing pain or injury to a child in any way.*

**It Is Never Appropriate to Punish an Infant.** Sometimes frustrated parents think that shaking a baby is a harmless way to try and stop the child from crying. Nothing could be farther from the truth! Shaking causes the brain to hit against the inside of the skull, and it can cause severe and permanent injury or death.

Babies cry. Usually, they cry because they are hungry, uncomfortable or need a diaper changed. First check that the baby has everything he or she needs and does not seem to be ill. If you have done all you can and the baby is still crying, learn positive ways of coping:

*Offer the baby a pacifier.*

*Take the baby for a walk in a stroller or a ride in the car.*

*Put the baby in a safe place, close the door and go to another room for a while.*

*Call a friend or relative who might be able to relieve you for a while.*

*Call your doctor for other tips on caring for a fussy baby.*

**The Law Holds You Responsible** for the care and safety of your child. If you permit your child to be in a situation where he or she may be injured, you yourself can be prosecuted if the child is injured. If you are frightened for your own safety or for that of your child, call the Texas Abuse Hotline at (800) 252-5400 or visit [www.txabusehotline.org](http://www.txabusehotline.org) or local law enforcement. If you are uneasy about your own behavior toward your child, you can call Parents Anonymous at (800) 554-2323.